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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 010950

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/23/2015

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SUBJECT: COLOMBIA,S AIR SAFETY CONCERNS

Classified By: DCM Milton Drucker for Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary. Troubling developments in Colombia,s civil aviation sector have brought to post,s attention that Colombia,s last FAA safety assessment took place in 1999. Recent plane crashes and questions concerning the integrity of the CAA,s safety oversight function suggest, at the least, that the GOC should evaluate current procedures and personnel to ensure compliance with ICAO standards. End Summary.

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FAA Officials Express Concern  
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2. (C) On September 27, visiting FAA officials (working as technical consultants to the GOC) met with DCM and Econoff to discuss their concerns regarding the CAA,s Air Safety Division. Based on their observations, FAA officials believe a recent pattern of insufficient oversight and improper inspections may warrant a technical safety review by the FAA of Colombian compliance with ICAO standards. The following issues were noted:

3. (C) Untrained/Incompetent Workers: Although CAA,s Air Safety workers do have previous industry experience, FAA inspectors believe they are inadequately trained. The FAA officials noted certain supervisors ignored cases where inspectors provided negative operator inspection reports that should have resulted in the grounding of unsafe aircraft. The FAA inspectors speculate that corruption may have influenced the inspection process.

4. (C) AeroSucre,s Airworthiness: CAA had grounded AeroSucre due to numerous air safety violations, but the order was recently rescinded. The FAA officials believe CAA Director General Fernando Sanclemente lifted the restrictions on AeroSucre due to political pressures from the company,s president, Jorge Solano, and not as a result of corrective action taken by the Colombia cargo carrier.

5. (U) Satena,s Airworthiness: According to FAA inspectors, Satena, an airline operated by the Colombia Air Force, does not have permission from the CAA,s Air Safety Division to fly commercial flights. However, FAA officials state that Satena continues to serve the public, despite the fact that under CAA air safety regulations its planes should undergo more stringent oversight. Embassy notes that Satena flies regularly scheduled commercial flights (Bogota-Medellin) and has a thriving charter business. The Air Force does not believe it is covered by civil regulations.

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Meeting with CAA  
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6. (U) On October 26, DCM met with CAA Director General Fernando Sanclemente regarding issues voiced by visiting FAA officials over apparent lapses in compliance with ICAO safety standards and questions regarding the integrity of the CAA,s inspection process. Sanclemente expressed concern over the DCM,s presentation, and offered assurances that Colombia was in full compliance with all ICAO safety standards. He further added that although AeroSucre had financial problems, it had provided an action plan displaying the manner in which it would eliminate its debt without risking the air safety of its flights. In addition, Sanclemente explained that since Satena is owned and operated by the Colombian Air Force, it is not required to meet CAA,s air safety standards. Instead, he assured Post that Satena follows an equally rigorous set of Colombian Air Force air safety regulations.

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Comment  
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7. (C) Recent developments (including the crash of a West Caribbean flight, AeroSucre,s changing airworthiness status, and the recent resignation of CAA Air Safety Secretary Captain Julio Consuegra) have focused attention on Colombia,s air safety situation. The fact that Colombia,s

last safety inspection was in 1999 suggests, at the least, that the GOC should do a thorough evaluation of its current procedures and its personnel to ensure its compliance with ICAO standards. In addition, post is concerned that rumored outside pressure on CAA could affect its objectivity. Therefore, FAA support for an evaluation would be desirable.  
DRUCKER